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Special Issue: History Alive! Old Sources, New Technologies

Library and Archives of Canada Collections As Resources for Classroom Learning.

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Abstract

This article promotes the on-line use of primary documents from Library and Archives of Canada (LAC) collections by high school students conducting historical inquiry into a major historic event in Canada's past. It outlines a unit of seven history lessons that the author wrote for the 'Learning Centre' at www.collectionscanada.ca/education/index-e.html, a website recently created by LAC. The unit: 'Canada and the Cold War: The Gouzenko Affair' offers a variety of student-centered, skill-oriented teaching/learning strategies with supporting on-line resources. A major criterion for these educational resources is that they fit into the official curricula of each province and territory in Canada.

Article

There is the cliché that if you give a man a fish you will feed him for a day, but if you show him how to fish, he will feed himself for the rest of his life. In recent decades there has been a major shift in the teaching of history at the high school level in Canada that better provides students with tools to be life long learners. Today, more than in the past teachers and students use the content of history as a means to develop skills of historical inquiry, many of which will serve students well later in life. Content by itself is often forgotten but can be easily accessed from a variety of sources when required.

Students should realize that history is a dynamic process; rarely, if ever, is it written in stone. Although solid facts may not change, over time new evidence, newly disclosed information, different generational perspectives, attitudes, and values can give historical events different frames of reference and interpretations.

Rather than being preoccupied with memorizing historical events, students today can analyze and interpret historic happenings and personages based on evidence such as that which can be found in primary sources. Students then can use this raw data of history to arrive at their own

conclusions and offer opinions about what happened in the past and about the people who have shaped historic events. In recent years, Library and Archives of Canada (LAC) has actively promoted this approach to learning history by making available on-line primary sources from its vast collections to students and teachers in classrooms across Canada. In addition to furnishing these sources, it has hired a number of professional teachers, including myself, to create a variety of educational resources and activities based on its holdings. This is intended to make the study of Canadian history more challenging, meaningful and even fun for both students and teachers. Students can access important rare documents by simply navigating the website and working as virtual historians. Assessment instruments are designed to test students' skills as much as their knowledge. Needless to say, this is a win-win situation. The public can now use these resources, which LAC has always wanted to make available, but until relatively recently found it problematic. The magic of the Internet has resolved LAC's major concern of protecting and preserving often-fragile valuable and rare documents from damage that can result from physical handling. What was available to a very small, select group of people just a few years ago can now be accessed by essentially anyone with a computer. To illustrate how students can use these resources LAC asked us, a team of history teachers, to write history units for the primary, junior and senior levels for its new website 'Learning Centre'. From a list that was provided, I chose the topic 'Canada and the Cold War: The Gouzenko Affair' at the senior level. I chose this topic for two reasons. One was that it was an interesting vehicle with which to demonstrate how students can use the primary resources from the website in their historical study. The other reason was that the Gouzenko Affair is an excellent example of how history can change over time because of changing circumstances.

An important criterion for this project is that our educational units must fit somewhere into the official curricula of each province and territory, therefore be relevant to students across the country. A brief description of this historic event is required.

Igor Gouzenko was a Russian cipher clerk working in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa in September 1945 when he and his wife decided to defect. They brought with them documents that exposed Soviet spy rings in Canada, Britain and the United States. The Defection itself is the stuff of high intrigue and drama a la Ian Fleming. The impact of this was that it started a chain reaction that eventually led to the exposure of well-known suspected spies such as Kim Philby of the United Kingdom, Alger Hiss, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the United States. Senator Joseph McCarthy carried on this quest to a paranoiac level with his Senate Committee's infamous Un-American Activities hearings of the early 1950s. The much publicized and televised hearings irreparably damaged the lives of a number of innocent people. 'McCarthyism' is a dark period in American history that is still indelibly etched on the minds of many Americans today.

For generations of Canadians since the war, the Gouzenko Affair has been little more than a footnote in Canadian high school history textbooks, overshadowed by other important Cold War events such as the Berlin Airlift, The Korean War, the Suez Crisis, NATO, NORAD and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Most people remember the man with the pillowcase over his head but that is about all. A revision of the Gouzenko Affair in history has been taking place in recent years because of the disclosure of new documents and information that had been sealed in secrecy since the defection. As it turns out, the Gouzenko Affair was an extremely important historic international event in the Cold War. This single incident led to a major change in the collective political thinking in the western world following the end of the Second World War - a major wake-up call for the west to the threat of worldwide communism. Many scholars today consider the Gouzenko Affair to be the first major

international event of the Cold War.

Outline of the Unit

The unit consists of seven lessons which call for students to locate and examine primary documents relevant to the Gouzenko Affair, taken from LAC's website: 'Learning Centre' at www.collectionscanada.ca/education/index-e.html. I use various student-centered teaching/learning strategies to maximize skill development, student participation and reinforcement. The teacher's main role is that of a facilitator of the learning process as well as a resource person.

Below are brief outlines of the lessons in the unit with specific references to relevant primary resources. Each lesson contains a synopsis of the lesson, a list of student expectations, pre-lesson preparations for the teacher, a narrative of the activities or tasks for the students, extensions (other applications), relevant vocabulary, further reading, and assessment opportunities. The primary documents referred to in the lessons come from 'The Evidence Web' on the 'Learning Center' website (LAC): www.collectionscanada.ca/education/index-e.html. Click on 'Evidence Web', 'Theme' then 'Cold War'. As of the time of this writing the unit itself is still in the process of translation into French and as yet is not up on the web, but the 'Evidence Web' is on-line.

Overall Expectations (more specific learning objectives are listed with each lesson)

By the end of the unit students will

- demonstrate an understanding of the impact of the Gouzenko affair on Canada and other countries;
- illustrate skills of historical inquiry while examining primary documents;
- locate, critically analyze and interpret evidence from primary sources;
- demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively;
- exhibit effective written and oral communication skills;
- manage time efficiently and work effectively in independent and collaborative study;
- formulate questions to facilitate research of primary sources;
- create organizers to arrange research;
- critically examine the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizens, groups and governments;
- demonstrate a high level of competence by producing research essays for a booklet and/or Web site;
- appreciate and respect diverse opinions about the Gouzenko affair;
- use appropriate vocabulary of the Cold War when communicating aspects of the Gouzenko affair.

Outlines of lessons

Lesson 1 introduces students to the Gouzenko Affair by asking them to write lead newspaper stories (300 -350 words) about the Gouzenko Affair based on a contemporary newspaper account, and the text of a statement released by Igor Gouzenko. (See 'The Evidence Web' for documents).

Lesson 2 examines why Gouzenko defected by analyzing a transcript of the official statement

made by Gouzenko and from the Interim Report of the Royal Commission dealing with documents stolen from the Soviet Embassy. The teacher asks students in pairs or small groups to simulate the writing of reports about the defection for Prime Minister Mackenzie King. (See 'The Evidence Web' for documents)

In lesson 3, students have the rare opportunity to read a few pages for Mackenzie King's 'secret' diary. King kept an official diary as well as a personal 'secret' diary, the latter becoming available to the public in recent years. Students will be able to draw conclusions about King's reaction to and his thoughts about the Gouzenko Affair from reading entries written or dictated at the time of the defection. Students will role-play advisors to the Prime Minister writing memos advising him of actions he should take. (See 'The Evidence Web' for documents)

Students in lesson 4 will investigate the issue of the rights of the citizen versus those of the state in emergency situations during peace time. In pairs they will work will develop an organizer comparing the invocation of Orders-in- Council # 6444 and # 411, to deal with the Gouzenko Affair with that of the War Measures Act to address the FLQ Crisis of October 1970. Order-in-Council P.C.# 6444 of Sept. 1945 provided the RCMP with extraordinary powers to arrest and detain suspected spies without the due process of law. Order-in-Council P.C. # 411 set up Royal Commission Hearings to summon suspects for questioning. Students will discover that the orders-in-council were very secret and that very few Canadians knew at the time that their civil rights were suspended for a number of months between October 1945 and February 1946. (See 'The Evidence Web' for documents)

In lesson 5, by means of a 'jigsaw' approach, students will analyze and interpret official reactions to the Orders-in-Council. The teacher assigns two documents supporting the use of the orders-in-council by the federal government and two others criticizing their use. The documents include: 'Use of Arbitrary Power' from the Winnipeg Free Press March11, 1945; 'The Communist Threat to Canada' (A pamphlet produced by Canadian Chamber of Commerce 1947; 'What's Behind the Spy Hysteria? The Answer', an interview with Tim Buck, Leader of the Canadian Communist Party; and excerpts from a House of Commons speech made by Opposition Leader George Drew in 1949. The teacher assigns one document to each group with some focus questions and an organizer to help them to manage their work. The members of the groups will later move into new groups to share research, opinions, and draw conclusions about the different reactions. (See 'The Evidence Web' for documents)

In pairs, students have the opportunity in lesson 6 to look into the profiles of eight Canadians who were brought before the Royal Commission as suspected spies. These documents can be found in the First and Second Interim Reports of the Royal Commission (pgs. 13 to 16). Student will draw conclusions about the questionable process and role of the Royal Commission in what appeared to be a 'judicial' matter. (See 'The Evidence Web' for documents)

Lesson 7 is a culminating activity for the unit. From a list of relevant themes or topics, students will write essays (400 - 500 words) for an anthology of essays on the Gouzenko Affair in booklet form for the school library and/or for a newly created website.

After completing the unit LAC field-tested lesson #5 in a grade 12 history class at a Kingston high school (Kingston Collegiate). The feedback strongly confirmed the value of using LAC documents in the classroom to meaningfully address issues in Canadian history.

A philosophy of Library and Archives of Canada is that its rare and valuable collections essentially belong to the Canadian People and therefore should be made available to them. With the Internet this is now possible as never before. Over the next few years LAC will continue to expand its program of sharing its collections and educational resources with the public. For students of history regardless of age or status, this is great news. I am happy to have had the opportunity to play a small part in this process.

References

Library and Archives of Canada 'Learning Centre':
www.collectionscanada.ca/education/index-e.html - Ottawa 2003.

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